



**University of
Zurich**^{UZH}

**Zurich Open Repository and
Archive**

University of Zurich
University Library
Strickhofstrasse 39
CH-8057 Zurich
www.zora.uzh.ch

Year: 2018

Responses to McGraw and French

Schmidt, Eva

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-812141-2.00015-5>

Posted at the Zurich Open Repository and Archive, University of Zurich

ZORA URL: <https://doi.org/10.5167/uzh-151755>

Book Section

Accepted Version

Originally published at:

Schmidt, Eva (2018). Responses to McGraw and French. In: Smythies, John; French, Robert. Direct versus indirect realism : a neurophilosophical debate on consciousness. London: Academic Press, 255-258.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-812141-2.00015-5>

Responses to McGraw and French

I'd like to thank David McGraw and Robert French for their insightful comments on my paper. I will begin by responding to McGraw's criticism.

McGraw addresses my attack on the last escape route for epistemological disjunctivism *sans* metaphysical disjunctivism. His complaint is that – to the contrary of what I claim the epistemological disjunctivist should endorse – when Louis sees the child drowning, what explains his knowledge that the child is drowning is not the fact itself that the child is drowning. It is not *because* of the fact that Louis knows this. For this is “hidden from him” (p. xx). Rather, his knowledge is explained by his perceptual functioning, which makes him aware of the fact that the child is drowning, and thus at best indirectly explained by the fact. I take it that this is an indirect realist claim. According to McGraw, it does not conflict with the idea that the concept of perception is fundamental, so that hallucination is “botched” perception.

Note that my claim was not that, for the epistemological disjunctivist, the perceived fact explains the perceiver's knowledge (though I agree that it does). It is rather that, analogously to the case of action, worldly facts can *justify* and *motivate* beliefs. What makes Louis's action of jumping in the water and saving the child right, or what counts in favor of his acting in this way, is that the child is drowning. Further, what moves him to jump in the water is this very fact. In the same vein, this fact makes Louis's belief that the child is drowning right and counts in favor of his so believing. It moves him to adopt this belief. McGraw doesn't explicitly oppose any of these claims (he talks about explanatory reasons, but doesn't mention justifying/normative or motivating reasons), but I suspect that he is opposed to them as well. For if worldly facts as explainers of knowledge are hidden from and thus inaccessible to the subject, it stands to reason that they are also hidden from and inaccessible to her as explainers of action and as motivators and justifiers of action and belief.

McGraw's comments don't touch on my argument that the epistemological disjunctivist should allow for worldly facts to be excellent reasons that justify belief. The first point I made with regard to this was that the strong anti-skeptical stance that motivates epistemological disjunctivism in the first place is weakened if the view cannot allow that the world itself contributes to the excellent justification of our beliefs. I agree with McGraw that a theorist who gives up on this last idea by conceding that the worldly facts are hidden from us can accept that hallucination is a kind of botched perception. But this theorist will thereby also give up on epistemological disjunctivism. However, I tried to raise problems for the *entrenched* epistemological disjunctivist. I argued that while she can allow that hallucination is perception gone awry while insisting that the mental state of perception provides for our excellent reasons, she thereby gives up on the claim that excellent reasons may be worldly facts to her own grave disadvantage.

The other argument I presented is based on the extremely plausible claim that what counts in favor of, or justifies, certain *actions* are worldly facts, not our experiences of them, and on a parallelism between reasons to act and reasons to believe. This argument does more than spell out what epistemological disjunctivists are committed to. It shows that it is generally desirable to allow that our reasons to believe include worldly facts. How does McGraw's objection affect this argument? As stated above, I agree that the assumption that we are never directly confronted with worldly facts puts pressure on the claim that they can justify or motivate our actions and beliefs. In particular, if we can never be aware that something is the case in our environment, it seems problematic to say that its being the case can motivate us to act or believe a certain way. But if something could never motivate us to perform a certain action or to adopt a certain belief, it is hard to conceive of it as something that counts in favor of this action or belief. For it can't be right that there may be normative reasons for us that we are in principle unable to pick up on.

It thus appears that the indirect realist view briefly sketched by McGraw conflicts with the thesis that worldly facts can be reasons to act and reasons for which we act. Since he gives no argument in his comment for why we should think that reality is hidden from the subject, and since the view that worldly facts can justify and motivate action is extremely plausible, however, this causes trouble for his indirect realist view and strengthens the epistemological disjunctivist proposal.

French suggests that the highest common factor view, into which epistemological disjunctivism is in danger of collapsing, is a version of indirect realism. If this is right, the only available version of direct realism is naïve realism. I think this is a very interesting point. Intentionalists will disagree with French's claim, however – they accept that there are substantial commonalities between perception and hallucination, for they are defined by their shared intentional content. But intentionalists deny that perceivers are in touch with the world only indirectly, for example by perceiving the intentional content of their experience that then represents their surroundings. Rather, they hold that perception represents the perceiver's environment immediately. That it represents the environment is to say that it has an intentional content; the view is not committed to thinking of the content as interposed between perceiver and environment. Similarly, intentionalists will say that representational vehicles underly perception; they are needed for the subject to be in touch with her surroundings. But again, this does not commit the view to holding that the subject directly perceives her representations and through them, indirectly, her environment. Maybe intentionalists are mistaken – but French would have to provide an argument why this is so.

Further, French is worried that my argument commits me to propositionalism about perceptual content. I am not so committed. (Cf. my (2015), where I argue that we should ascribe two levels of content to perceptual experience, scenario content and an external content consisting of worldly states of affairs. I argue for pragmatism about the nature of perceptual content in my (n.d.).) Admittedly, in my argument against epistemological disjunctivism *sans* metaphysical disjunctivism, I phrase my references to perceptual content propositionally. My motivation is that, on the one hand, it is convenient to pick out perceptual contents propositionally when talking about perceptual justification. For this manner of speaking suggests a simple account of perceptual justification modeled on belief-to-belief justification, viz. in terms of inferences between believed propositions of the same kind. By contrast, if we think of perception as directed at objects, this opens up a worry about how exactly perception can justify belief if it has this structure, which I wanted to bypass. (I do propose an account of perceptual justification based on the assumption that perception has non-propositional content in my (2015).)

On the other hand, nothing in the argument hinges on how we conceive of perceptual content, as consisting of objects, Fregean propositions, states of affairs, etc. The essentials of my argument are that, given transparency, the excellent, reflectively accessible reason present in the good case exhausts what is subjectively conscious about perception. So there can be no substantial commonalities with hallucination. For this argument, it makes no difference what exactly it is that the excellent reason consists in, for example, whether it is a worldly object or state of affairs (i.e., something non-propositional). The other horn of the dilemma is that, if we assume that there is a commonality between perception and hallucination with regard to their conscious character, we leave no more room for perception to make an excellent reason reflectively available to the perceiver. Again, the correctness of this point does not hinge on what exactly the excellent reason is, ontologically speaking. It may be an object or a (non-propositional) state of affairs, for example.

References

Eva Schmidt (2015). *Modest Nonconceptualism: Epistemology, Phenomenology, and Content*. Studies in Brain and Mind Series vol. 8. Cham: Springer.

Eva Schmidt (n.d.). "Can We Do Without Content Pragmatism?" (manuscript)